

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Łukasz Kurek

Lawyer and philosopher, assistant professor at the Department of Philosophy of Law and Legal Ethics at the Jagiellonian University, member of the Copernicus Center for Interdisciplinary Studies. Stipendist of the Foundation for Polish Science. Author or co-author of publications pertaining to legal philosophy and philosophy of mind, including *Dualizm przekonań* (Copernicus Center Press 2016).

Naturalistic fallacy

Błąd naturalistyczny

Article history: Received: 10.09.2017 Accepted: 15.11.2017 Published: 30.12.2017

Abstract:

The goal of the paper is to determine the meta-ethical influence of the 'naturalistic fallacy' argument formulated by George E. Moore. In the first part of the paper, the 'naturalistic fallacy' argument is subject to critical analysis. In the following parts of the work, the influence of this argument on the inception of two main meta-ethical standpoints – namely naturalism and antinaturalism – is indicated. What is more, the paper contains the assessment of strengths and weaknesses of these meta-ethical conceptions.

Keywords:

naturalistic fallacy, metaethics, naturalism, antinaturalism, emotivism

Streszczenie:

Celem artykułu jest próba ustalenia jaki wpływ na rozwój metaetyki miał zarzut „błędu naturalistycznego” sformułowany przez George’a E. Moore’a. W pierwszej części artykułu zarzut ten został poddany krytycznej analizie. W kolejnych częściach tekstu wskazano wpływ owego zarzutu na wykształcenie się głównych stanowisk metaetycznych, w szczególności naturalizmu oraz antynaturalizmu. W artykule dyskutowane są również mocne oraz słabe strony tych koncepcji metaetycznych.

Słowa kluczowe:

błąd naturalistyczny, metaetyka, naturalizm, antynaturalizm, emotytywizm

Introduction

Philosophical research on morality has been divided into two categories. The first of these is the study of general moral issues that consist in attempts to answer such moral questions as: 'Which deeds are good and which are bad?', 'What kind of person should one be?' or 'What has moral value?'. Normative ethics is concerned with these studies, and as their result various moral judgments are formulated. Ethical theories built within normative ethics are sometimes referred to as first-order theories. The second category of philosophical research on morality concerns the nature of morality and moral judgments, and examples of questions related to these issues are: 'Do moral truths or properties exist?', 'Do moral judgments express convictions or emotions?' or 'What is the relationship between morality and rationality?' These studies belong to metaethics, because as their result, it is not moral judgments that are formulated, but claims about morality and moral judgments. Therefore, the ethical theories built within metaethics are sometimes called second-order theories, paying attention to the important difference between ethics and metaethics.

From the perspective of the history of philosophy, many thinkers have undertaken considerations on the nature of moral judgments and morality, but systematic meta-ethical reflection was undertaken much later, at the beginning of the 20th century, and the reason for their commencement was the publication of *Principia Ethica* by George E. Moore in 1903. In his groundbreaking work, the British philosopher undertakes to answer not only to the traditional questions of normative ethics, but – what is particularly important – he builds the first mature

meta-ethical theory, or the theory of meaning of moral judgments. The formulation of this theory was possible due to Moore's clear distinction between considerations about what is good from the considerations about the concept of good. It is on this distinction that his famous naturalistic fallacy argument is based – a fallacy which is to be committed by anyone who defines moral concepts. In particular, when he defines them in naturalistic terms. The importance of this aforementioned domain distinction was so great that in the first half of the twentieth century, metaethics completely dominated moral philosophy, and it was only in the 1970s, when traditional questions of normative ethics regained their prestige. This was mainly due to the fact that many contemporary philosophers thought that thanks to Moore, ethics was granted the basis on which real research on morality and moral judgments became possible for the first time in the history of philosophy^[1].

Distinguishing ethical theories of the first and second order quickly led to the development of three meta-ethical theories which dominated the first half of the twentieth century, namely emotivism, antinaturalism and naturalism. It is difficult to provide uncontroversial description of these theories, in particular naturalism and antinaturalism, but it seems that they can be distinguished by taking into account two questions: the ontological question – 'Do moral properties exist?' – and an epistemological question – 'How can one learn moral properties?'. Naturalists argue that moral properties exist and can be known by empirical methods. According to antinaturalists, moral properties also exist, but they believe that they cannot be known by empirical methods. On the other

¹Baldwin, T., Moore, G. E. (1990) *The Arguments of the Philosophers*, Honderich, T. (ed.) Londyn, Routledge, p. 66.

hand, the emotivists claim that moral properties do not exist. Hence, they cannot be known by empirical methods. Before presenting the influence of Moore's argument on the development of these theories, it is worth paying attention to the meta-ethical views of this philosopher.

Moore's argument

Opposing the naturalistic ethical theories, which assume that moral truths can be found by referring to the nature of man, Moore claimed that the basic moral truths are independent of the moral subject. In *Principia Ethica*, the British philosopher argued that the

more, he claimed that this mistake 'can be found in almost every ethical work'².

The term 'naturalistic fallacy' is introduced by Moore in the context of considerations about the analogy between the qualities 'yellow' and 'good'. He believes that just as it is a mistake to define 'yellow' by referring to physical properties that cause some objects to be perceived as yellow, it is also wrong to define 'good' by referring to the natural properties of things that make it good. In addition, 'yellow' and 'good' are simple concepts that cannot be explained to someone who does not know the color of yellow and what good is. This leads to the conclusion that 'good' is not a natural and definable property.

With few exceptions, under the influence of Moore, the 20th century began with the rejection of naturalism in ethics. It occurred despite the fact that many modern philosophers assumed that their research is a continuation of scientific research, and the facts about human nature are in a close relation to traditional philosophical questions, in particular with ethical questions.

status of these truths is close to the status of the truths of arithmetic, because they are abstract, necessary and concern the values that belong to certain states of things due to their essence. In addition, these truths are known directly, by means of a special kind of moral intuition. Supporting the claim about the special status of moral truths, Moore stated that ethical theories, which define values referring to facts, such as facts about human nature, are based on a naturalistic fallacy. What is

In the context of Moore's ethical considerations, this solution is particularly important, because he believes that the concept of good is the most fundamental moral concept.

The key argument of the author of *Principia Ethica* against the naturalistic ethical theories, supporting the thesis about the indefinability of

²Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/53430/53430-h/53430-h.htm>.

good, was called ‘the open-question argument’. This argument has the form of a thought experiment, which should be carried out by all who come across the definition of good; it was described by the author as follows:

The hypothesis that disagreement about the meaning of good is disagreement with regard to the correct analysis of a given whole, may be most plainly seen to be incorrect by consideration of the fact that, whatever definition be offered, it may be always asked, with significance, of the complex so defined, whether it is itself good. To take, for instance, one of the more plausible, because one of the more complicated, of such proposed definitions, it may easily be thought, at first sight, that to be good may mean to be that which we desire to desire. Thus if we apply this definition to a particular instance and say ‘When we think that A is good, we are thinking that A is one of the things which we desire to desire,’ our proposition may seem quite plausible. But, if we carry the investigation further, and ask ourselves ‘Is it good to desire to desire A?’ it is apparent, on a little reflection, that this question is itself as intelligible, as the original question ‘Is A good?’—that we are, in fact, now asking for exactly the same information about the desire to desire A, for which we formerly asked with regard to A itself. But it is also apparent that the meaning of this second question cannot be correctly analysed into ‘Is the desire to desire A one of the things which we desire to desire?’: we have not before our minds anything so complicated as the question ‘Do we desire to desire to desire to desire A?’ Moreover any one can easily convince himself by inspection that the predicate of this proposition—‘good’—is positively different from the notion of ‘desiring to desire’ which enters into its subject: ‘That we should desire to desire A is good’ is *not*

merely equivalent to ‘That A should be good is good.’ It may indeed be true that what we desire to desire is always also good; perhaps, even the converse may be true: but it is very doubtful whether this is the case, and the mere fact that we understand very well what is meant by doubting it, shews clearly that we have two different notions before our minds³.

Considering any definition of good, according to which it is identical to the complex property of *W*, it will always be reasonable to ask whether *W* is good. In other words, whether *W* is good is an open question, because denying that *W* is good is not contradictory. On the other hand, the question of whether *W* is *W* is meaningless – it is not an open question, because the denial that *W* is *W* is contradictory. It follows that good cannot be identical to any complex property. The basic assumption of the open-question argument is that any proposal to define good will the truth of any proposal to define good is an open question to anyone who understands the concepts that appear in it.

Many objections were raised against the open-question argument, three of which seem particularly important. First, Moore does not justify that this argument will work for all possible definitions of good. Although he considers a few such specific definitions – such as the view that good is pleasure, the view that good is what we desire and the view that good is what we desire to desire – in regards to which this argument works very well, it cannot be solely stated on this basis that the definition of good is impossible.

The second, much more serious objection against Moore’s argument consists in the fact that he assumes that good cannot be identical to

³ Ibidem, p. 18–19.

the complex property of *W* if the expression ‘*W* is good’ is analytic or true by definition. The fact that pleasure is pleasant can be deduced on the basis of conceptual analysis – because it is true by definition – but it is not an analytical judgment that pleasure is good. Many modern philosophers reject this assumption. Some natural properties are identical to others, although judgments expressing these identities are not analytical^[4]. For example, water is H₂O – the property of being water is identical to the property of being H₂O – despite the fact that the judgments expressing this identity is not true by definition. In other words, the analysis of the concept of water and the concept of H₂O does not allow to recognize this identity. The open-question argument is therefore effective only in relation to analytic definitions – synthetic definitions are resistant to it.

The third argument against the open-question argument is related to the so-called ‘paradox of analysis – a problem perceived by Moore himself. This paradox consists in the fact that conceptual analysis cannot be both correct and non-trivial, because if it is correct, it is trivial, and if it is nontrivial, it is incorrect. The paradox of analysis is problematic for the open-question argument, because this argument seems to lead to the conclusion that a question which is not deprived of meaning, for example, ‘Is what we desire to desire good?’ is as trivial as the question ‘Is what we desire to desire in fact what we desire to desire?’. In order to better explain this problem, it is worth introducing a distinction between semantic analysis and philosophical analysis and a distinction between concepts and properties^[5].

For example, the semantic analysis of ‘bachelor’ leads to the formulation ‘unmarried man’, and the question ‘Is a bachelor an unmarried man?’ is trivial. On the other hand, while the expression ‘what we desire to desire’ cannot be considered as the result of the analysis of the term ‘good’, it does not mean that the expression cannot be the result of a correct philosophical analysis of good, because this analysis does not only rely on the superficial meaning of the analyzed concept^[6].

Interestingly, different versions of the open-question argument were used by many philosophers in the twentieth century, depending on whether they agreed to the internalism proposed by David Hume^[7]. This conception consisted in the assumption that motivation is internal in relation to moral judgments. Therefore, it is not possible to issue authentic moral judgments without having a certain motivation for acting in accordance with them or having appropriate emotions. If internalism is real, then the open question ‘I understand that this is good, but why should I care?’ becomes groundless^[8]. This question is meaningless and therefore the proposed analysis fails.

Moore’s considerations had one more consequence, which had a significant impact on the subsequent meta-ethical discussion. Despite the fact that the main target of criticism of the British philosopher were naturalistic theories, he saw that his arguments reached much further. The claim about the indefinability of good can be raised in relation to each theory, the purpose of which is to determine what it is, and therefore

^[4]*Ibidem*.

^[4]Kripke, S. (1980) *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Putnam, H. *The meaning of ‘meaning’*, *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, 7, p. 131–193.

^[5]Sosa, E., Moore, E. (2001), in: Martinich, A. P., Sosa, D. (eds.) *A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 46.

^[7]Stout, R. (2008) *Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy*, in: Moran, D. (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy*, Nowy Jork: Routledge, p. 854.

^[8]*Ibidem*.

also against metaphysical theories, which identify it with a supernatural property, in particular against theological theories⁹. This leads to the conclusion that Moore was an opponent of not only naturalism, but also supranaturalism, because good cannot be identified only with what, for example, we desire to desire, but also with, for example, metaphysical property of being in harmony with the will of God. Interestingly, despite the differences between naturalism and supranaturalism, the British philosopher recognized that in both cases, the error of defining good is so similar that it can be called generally a 'naturalistic fallacy'. Therefore, the theories against which this argument may be raised are not only naturalistic, but they are all theories that define good.

For many, this consequence of Moore's argumentation has made his positive meta-ethical position difficult to accept. He claims that good is neither a natural nor a supernatural property, which leads to the conclusion that it must belong to yet another, special ontological category to which only moral properties belong¹⁰. This solution has not been made more convincing by stating that we can get to know these properties through a special kind of moral intuition, which also seems to be difficult to define.

In summary, despite many ambiguities and problems related to the open-question argument, it remains an influential argument in the history of philosophy. The first great meta-ethical theories built in the twentieth century, such as emotivism or antinaturalism, arose in a philosophical context in which it was generally agreed that, on the one hand, Moore demonstrated that good is indefinable, but on the other hand his positive ethi-

cal views – according to which moral truths have a special ontological and epistemological status – are unsustainable. What is more, it seems justified to say that despite the rejection of Moore's solutions regarding what good is, in the current meta-ethical discussion, one can still observe the strong influence of his argumentation about what it is not – which is evidenced by the continuing discussion of naturalistic fallacy¹¹.

Moral naturalism

Moral naturalism is a meta-ethical view according to which moral properties exist and can be known by empirical methods. For two reasons, this seems to be a particularly attractive stance. First, if moral properties do exist, then theories of normative ethics do not lose their *raison d'être*, because the basic category of objects postulated by these theories is moral properties. Thus, these theories describe a part of reality. Secondly, if these properties can be learned by empirical methods, then the philosophical search for these properties may refer to the results of the empirical sciences, in particular those that are relevant to questions about the nature of moral judgments, such as psychology or biology.

With few exceptions, under the influence of Moore, the 20th century began with the rejection of naturalism in ethics. It occurred despite the fact that many modern philosophers assumed that their research is continuous with science, and that the facts about human nature are in a close relation to traditional philosophical questions, in particular to ethical questions. Along with the emergence of analytic philosophy, the views on the method and domain of philosophy

⁹Moore, G. E. *Zasady etyki*, op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁰Stout, R. *Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 855.

¹¹Brożek, A., Brożek, B., Stelmach, J. (2013) *Fenomen normatywności*, Kraków: Copernicus Center Press, p. 195–204.

have undergone a significant change, mainly because language and logic have become the main subjects of philosophical interest, and special attention has been paid to confusing conceptual issues with factual issues. These transformations have caused that many philosophers recognized philosophy as a discipline independent of the empirical sciences. This conviction also concerned considerations about the nature of moral judgments. From today's perspective, this solution may seem unconvincing, because the findings of some sciences are particularly valuable in the context of questions about the nature of moral judgments: psychology describes the reasoning and motivation in moral contexts, history describes the cultural evolution of moral systems, and the theory of evolution gives insight into the biological nature of man. Due to the above distinction between conceptual and factual issues, these scientific disciplines were, however, generally regarded as unrelated to ethics.

The motivation of naturalists is therefore the desire to practice ethics in the context of the empirical sciences, which is an expression of a more general view that philosophical considerations can be viewed as continuous with science. The assumption that moral properties are natural, however, requires determining what natural property is, which turned out to be extremely problematic. However, we can roughly say that natural property is a property which is recognized either in everyday experience or the property to which scientific theories refer. According to this description, natural properties that may play a role in ethical considerations may be related to, for example, a person's preferences, his desires, emotions or dispositions. The 'naturalistic fallacy' argument concerns those naturalistic ethical theories that define moral concepts in terms of the aforementioned natural characteristics of a person. However, not all naturalists defined moral

concepts in this way – some of them postulated only the grounding of these concepts in naturalist terminology. Not all naturalists, therefore, intended to reduce moral properties to natural properties, which is a straightforward consequence of identifying identities between properties belonging to these two categories. It seems that Moore assumed that the acceptance of a naturalistic position must lead to this kind of reduction^[12].

However, the reduction of moral properties to natural properties would be implied by naturalism only if it were based on the assumption that with respect to any natural property, we can provide a corresponding term which would not be a moral term^[13]. In such a situation, if 'good' refers to a certain natural property, there will also be a natural term that can be combined with 'good' and to which 'good' will be reduced^[14]. However, there is no guarantee that even when all moral terms refer to natural properties, it will be possible to replace the moral terms with natural terms. The assumption that all moral terms correspond to a moral property, but it is impossible to reduce these terms to natural terms is accepted by philosophers, which are described as non-reductive naturalists.

One of the most influential ethical naturalists of the first half of the twentieth century, John Dewey, was a proponent of such non-reductionism. On the one hand, he claimed that moral judgments refer to moral values, and these judgments can be examined via scientific method^[15].

¹²Sturgeon, N. (2006) Ethical Naturalism, in: Copp, D. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 98.

¹³*Ibidem*.

¹⁴*Ibidem*.

¹⁵Andersen, E. (2014) Dewey's Moral Philosophy, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu>.

Opposing to the separation of science from disciplines such as moral philosophy, Dewey wrote:

The other generic change lies in doing away once for all with the traditional distinction between moral goods, like the virtues, and natural goods like health, economic security, art, science and the like. The point of view under discussion is not the only one which has deplored this rigid distinction and endeavored to abolish it. Some schools have even gone so far as to regard moral excellencies, qualities of character as of value only because they promote natural goods.

come part of the apparatus of moral inquiry or science^[16].

The empirical method allows not only to reach the scientific truth, but also the moral truth. On the other hand, according to the American philosopher and psychologist, moral values associated with the feeling of happiness and are essential for morality only in that they provide material that is then developed in the process of rational construction of value^[17]. Dewey's intention was to ground morality in experience, which was an expression of opposition to overly rationalistic normative ethics, for example, Kant's

These philosophers believe that something which cannot be captured by any naturalistic analysis of the moral language is the emotions of the speaker, which for them have become the main subject of interest in connection with the nature of morality and moral judgments.

But the experimental logic when carried into morals makes every quality that is judged to be good according as it contributes to amelioration of existing ills. And in so doing, it enforces the moral meaning of natural science. When all is said and done in criticism of present social deficiencies, one may well wonder whether the root difficulty does not lie in the separation of natural and moral science. When physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, contribute to the detection of concrete human woes and to the development of plans for remedying them and relieving the human estate, they become moral; they be-

ethics based on a categorical imperative, which he would call 'empty formalism'^[18].

Moral principles can therefore be tested just like scientific truths are tested. Conducting tests of moral principles makes it possible, first, to improve these principles when they do not give clear guidelines a specific mode of action. Secondly, as Dewey claimed, practical verification of moral hypotheses ensures their correctness.

¹⁶Dewey, J. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/40089/40089-h/40089-h.htm#CHAPTER_VII.

¹⁷Stout, R. *Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 855.

¹⁸Andersen, E. *Dewey's Moral Philosophy*, op. cit.

If the action in accordance with these hypotheses does not lead to the consequences they describe, they should be changed accordingly. Action in accordance with moral hypotheses therefore provides data on the same principle in which scientific experiments provide data to scientists who use this data to build and refine their theories^[19].

For modern non-reductive naturalism, the notion of supervenience is important. Two very general properties of supervenience can be pointed out, which are invariably the starting point in the discussion about it. First, supervenience is a relation. The members of this relation can, however, be defined differently. In the context of ethical naturalism, however, the relation between natural properties and moral properties is most often discussed. Secondly, this relation defines a particular dependence between its elements. This relation is best expressed by the words of David Lewis: ‘There are no differences of one kind, without differences of a different kind.’^[20] It means that if two sets of properties are provided, namely set A and set B, then if the moral properties belonging to A supervene on the natural properties belonging to B, a change in B results in a change in A.. In other words, if there is a change in the basic properties, there must also be a change in the supervening properties. Supervenience assumes the dependence of supervening (moral) properties on basic (natural) properties, and at the same time gives supervening properties a certain autonomy. Furthermore, supervening properties do not have to correspond to a specific set of basic properties, because they can be implemented by vari-

ous basic properties, according to the multiple realizability thesis. Interestingly, despite the extraordinary role that supervenience now plays in the philosophy of mind, this term was used for the first time in the context of meta-ethical considerations, and it was done by Richard Hare in the work *The Language of Morals* published in 1952^[21]. This relation did appear earlier in meta-ethical considerations, but it was not called ‘supervenience’ at the time. For example, Moore, in his work *Philosophical Studies* from 1922, defining the relation between natural and moral properties, stated that: ‘if a thing has, to some extent, internal value, then this thing must possess this value not only in the same degree in all circumstances, but everything which is exactly the same must, in all circumstances, possess it to the same extent’^[22]. This feature of the relation between natural and moral properties corresponds, of course, to supervenience, because it is based on the principle that ‘there are no differences of one kind, without differences of another kind’.

Despite the above advantages of supervenience, significant difficulties are also associated with this relation. One of them consists in the fact that supervenience may not fulfill the hopes placed in it by moral naturalists, because it may also be used by antinaturalists. It does not determine how supervenient properties exist and does not allow their reduction to basic properties. This relation allows for the existence of supervenient properties in a world separate from the natural one. A quintessential example – taken from the philosophy of mind – is the use of supervenience by proponents of epiphenom-

^[19]Ibidem.

^[20]Lewis, D. (1986) *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 14.

^[21]Hare, R. (1952) *The Language of Morals*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

^[22]Moore, G. E. (1922) *Philosophical Studies*, London: Harcourt, Brace & Co., p. 268.

enalism, which is a dualistic stance. According to the epiphenomenalists, mental properties do not have a 'causal force' because they belong to a separate ontological category. However, they supervene on physical properties that have the possibility of causal influence. Physical properties can affect not only other physical properties, but also mental properties.

The most important problem of supervenience seems to be its excessive generality. This relation allows only a rather ambiguous statement that objects having the same physical properties will have the same moral properties. However, this dependence is too weak to be able to indicate which physical properties determine moral properties. For example, the view that morality is closely related to the functioning of the human mind, in particular how it issues moral judgments, seems to be plausible. The correct characterization of moral judgments should also, however, take into account, among others, the biological and social contexts of their issuing. In contrast, such physical properties as the color of one's hair, the type of clothing worn, or one's foot size do not seem to have much impact on moral judgments. The supervenience relationship, however, does not provide precise hints as to which physical properties should be basic properties for moral properties.

Emotivism

Many philosophers have leaned towards naturalism, but – due to, i.e., Moore's argumentation – they regarded it as an untenable view. On the other hand, they were skeptical in regards with the thesis about the existence of unnatural and non-empirical moral properties. These philosophers believe that something which cannot be captured by any naturalistic analysis of the

moral language is the emotions of the speaker, which for them have become the main subject of interest in connection with the nature of morality and moral judgments. Therefore, the ethical theories they have built are called emotivist. Although some elements of emotivism can be found in earlier philosophers, in particular David Hume, the first mature emotivist theory was created by British philosophers from the 1920s and 1930s, in particular Charles Ogden and Ivor Richards. An important subject of these philosophers' research was the situations in which language actually refers to certain objects, and when it only appears to refer to something real. In their book *The meaning of meaning*, one can find the following excerpt about the language of ethics:

This peculiar ethical use of 'good' is, we suggest, a purely emotive use. When so used the word stands for nothing whatever, and has no symbolic function. Thus, when we so use it in the sentence, 'This is good,' we merely refer to tins, and the addition of 'is good' makes no difference whatever to our reference. When on the other hand, we say 'This is red,' the addition of 'is red' to 'this' does symbolize an extension of our reference, namely, to some other red thing. But 'is good' has no comparable symbolic function; it serves only as an emotive sign expressing our attitude to this, and perhaps evoking similar attitudes in other persons, or inciting them to actions of one kind or another²³.

This means that moral judgments are non-cognitive. Their role is to influence the mental states or attitudes of others. They do not describe or represent facts, as cognitivists would claim – that includes both naturalists and moral

²³Ogden, C., Richards, I. (1923) *The meaning of meaning*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Young, p. 125.

antinaturalists. Emotivists were of the opinion that the categories of truth and falsehood do not apply to moral judgments. For example, the statement 'killing is bad' is not intended to describe any fact about killing, but only to express the speaker's negative attitude towards this act. Thus, the emotivists deny that there are moral properties that the words 'good' or 'bad' would correspond to. Moral judgments express emotions, and any other content of these judgments plays only a marginal role. The idea was further developed by Alfred J. Ayer and Charles Stevenson, the most well-known representatives of emotivism^[24]. Stevenson clearly stated: 'There is no doubt that there is always an element of description in moral judgments, but that is not all. Their basic role does not consist in the description of facts, but in *influencing* others'^[25]. This solution is of considerable importance for the status of moral discourse, because if it does not correspond to any facts, then moral disputes can be reduced to the difference in the emotions of the participants in this dispute; these emotions concern the moral issue being the subject of the dispute. The goal of moral discourse is to influence the emotions of the other participants in this discourse. This meta-ethical theory is immune to the accusation of a naturalistic fallacy, because in this theory, moral terms do not refer to moral concepts, which in turn could be applied correctly or incorrectly in specific situations. It can even be said that emotivism is an attempt to answer Moore's argument.

In addition, emotivism has at least two advantages

over other meta-ethical theories that were created in the initial phase of metaethics' development. First, it clearly shows how moral judgments can motivate people to act in accordance with these judgments. Both naturalism and anti-naturalism assume that moral judgments express beliefs whose role, in accordance with the universally accepted model of practical reasoning proposed by David Hume, consists in representing means to achieve a given goal. The goals of the action are determined by non-cognitive states, such as emotions or desires. This model is aptly described by Hume when he claims that 'reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions'^[26]. If moral judgments express emotions that motivate people to act, it is easy to explain that people will have a tendency to act in accordance with the moral judgments they express.

Another advantage of emotivism is a simple explanation of the relation of supervenience between the moral and natural properties. Two states of affairs that differ in their moral characteristics will also differ in their natural characteristics, because if two states of affairs are significantly different from each other, then a given person will have the disposition to feel different emotions as the response to these states of affairs. If, on the other hand, two states of affairs are significantly similar to each other, then a given person will have the disposition to feel the same emotions in relation to these states of affairs, and the moral characteristics of these states of affairs will be the same.

However, a number of objections have been formulated against emotivism, which in general have led to abandoning of this meta-ethical theory. One of them was formulated by Peter

²⁴Ayer, A. J. (1936) *Language, Truth and Logic*, Londyn: Gollancz; Stevenson, C. (1937) *The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms*, *Mind*, 46, p. 14–31.

²⁵Stevenson, C. *The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms*, op. cit., p. 18.

²⁶Hume, D. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, <http://www.davidhume.org/texts/thn.html>.

Geach and John Searle, who noticed that emotivism satisfactorily explains the meaning of only simple, affirmative moral statements – for example, ‘Killing is bad’ – the meaning of which is meant to only be an illusion^[27]. Moral sentences, however, often occur also in other forms, in particular they may be more complex – such as the sentence ‘If killing is bad, euthanasia is immoral.’ In this context, the statement that the speaker only expresses his negative emotions about killing is unconvincing. Logical inference does not concern emotions, but objects referring to reality, and therefore having truth value.

In addition, emotivism unsatisfactorily explains the status of moral discourse, in which the rationality of argumentation allows only to influence the behavior of other participants in this discourse – by affecting their emotions – which basically brings this discourse to attempts to manipulate other people. However, the authentic moral discourse consists in something more, because it should provide the participants of this discourse with reasons for action, on the basis of which they can rationally accept the moral views of others. If a given person thinks that they should not behave according to a certain moral principle, then it seems correct to say that they do not agree with this principle, and not only with the emotional disposition of someone who has formulated this principle. In other words, the emotional disposition of the author of this principle does not easily become the basis for the action consistent with it.

These problems have led to the fall of original emotivism, but other non-cognitive theories still play a large role in meta-ethical considerations.

Due to the above problems of emotivism, the main tendency in the development of these theories consisted in taking into account morality-related objectivity and rationality to the biggest extent possible, while at the same time denying that moral judgments are descriptive^[28]. An interesting example of contemporary non-cognitive theory is the expressivism of Allan Gibbard, who understands moral judgments not as simple expressions of emotions, but as complex, higher-order attitudes. This expressiveness implies that the negative moral judgment concerning a given act is based on the acceptance of the norm, according to which a negative emotional reaction as a response to this action is correct, which indicates how, in a moral context, one can judge feelings in terms of their rationality. This solution makes it possible to assess whether specific emotional responses are appropriate or not without reference to moral values that would justify this assessment.

Moral antinaturalism

Antinaturalists claim that moral properties do exist, but it is impossible to know them using empirical methods. Both naturalists and moral antinaturalists are, in contrast to non-cognitivists, moral realists, but only anti-naturalists emphasize the autonomy of moral philosophy in relation to science. This autonomy is a consequence of the assumption that moral properties are not natural properties. In some philosophers, this assumption generates an extremely strong, negative reaction. The pressure on antinaturalists is connected with the plausible claim that there cannot be two completely independent, natural, and moral domains. The first one would be a well-known domain of the empirical sciences,

²⁷Geach, P. (1960) *Ascriptivism*, *Philosophical Review*, 69, p. 221–225; Searle, J. (1962) *Meaning and Speech Acts*, *Philosophical Review*, 71, p. 423–432.

²⁸Stout, R. *Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 861.

and the latter a much more mysterious domain of moral philosophy. It seems that if there really are properties of being good or bad, then they must be properties of natural objects such as people or their actions. It also seems that natural objects can only have natural properties. The thesis about the existence of separate moral properties leads to the assumption of the existence of a bizarre ontological category, quite different and unrelated to the world studied by science.

However, due to the above-mentioned difficulties in defining naturalism – and consequently also anti-naturalism – sometimes the boundary between naturalism and moral antinaturalism blurs. For example, non-reductive naturalism, according to which it is impossible to reduce moral properties to natural properties, would be substantially similar to anti-naturalism. This version of naturalism also indicates the important limitations of empirical research on morality as-

good were very widespread in the 20th century. Other philosophers who, in the 1930s, laid the foundations for the theory of moral intuitionism are members of the group referred to as ‘British intuitionists’ and its main characters are Harold A. Prichard and William D. Ross^[29].

Ross’s work, entitled *The Right and the Good*, was the culmination of the evolution of moral intuitionism; this theory dominated the British philosophy for almost two centuries before its publication^[30]. In this book, Ross proposed an intuitionistic theory, which was characterized by such clarity and breadth that this work almost immediately became a philosophical classic and for a few years after its publication was at the center of a furious dispute in moral philosophy.

Ross’s intuitionism can be divided into two types: epistemological and methodological^[31]. According to his epistemological intuitionism, it is possi-

The most important argument of moral antinaturalists in favor of distinguishing the natural world from the moral world consists in the thesis about the normativity of morality.

sociated with the difficulty in finding a natural term that would not be moral for each property.

There is no doubt, however, that a paradigmatic example of a moral antinaturalist was Moore, whose open-question argument was to refute all proposals of naturalistic definitions of moral concepts. This argument has not survived the test of time, but the belief of this British philosopher that it is a mistake to define moral concepts in natural categories together with the proposal about a special, intuitive way of knowing what is

ble to have direct knowledge about whether certain things are right or wrong, which is acquired through intuition. This knowledge is possible because moral duties, according to which these things are right or wrong, are obvious. This leads

²⁹Prichard, H. (2002) *Moral Writings*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; Ross, W. (2002) *The Right and the Good*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁰Ross, W. *The Right and the Good*, op. cit., p. ix.

³¹Ibidem, p. xii-xiii.

to the conclusion that to know about these duties, it is enough to understand them – they can be learned *a priori*. This does not mean, however, that all moral duties can be learnt in this way – this only applies to the most fundamental duties. Ross calls them *prima facie* duties. Ross characterizes the obviousness of *prima facie* duties in the following way:

That an act, *qua* fulfilling a promise, or *qua* effecting a just distribution of good, or *qua* returning services rendered, or *qua* promoting the good of others, or *qua* promoting the virtue or insight of the agent, is *prima facie* right, is self-evident; not in the sense that it is evident from the beginning of our lives, or as soon as we attend to the proposition for the first time, but in the sense that when we have reached sufficient mental maturity and have given sufficient attention to the proposition it is evident without any need of proof, or of evidence beyond itself. It is self-evident just as a mathematical axiom, or the validity of a form of inference, is evident. (...) In our confidence that these propositions are true there is involved the same trust in our reason that is involved in our confidence in mathematics; and we should have no justification for trusting it in the latter sphere and distrusting it in the former. In both cases we are dealing with propositions that cannot be proved, but that just as certainly need no proof^[32].

Intuition is, therefore, a rational capacity that allows to comprehend evident judgments. In addition, intuition is understood cognitively by Ross. It also states that it allows not only to recognize that a given judgment – moral or mathematical – is obvious, but also allows to comprehend the truth of these judgments^[33].

Methodological intuitionism is based on the assumption that there are many moral obligations that can be in conflict with each other. In a situation of conflict between *prima facie* duties, only decisions that are more or less probable regarding the validity or unfairness of the act are possible. According to Ross, there is no superior moral obligation to which other duties can be reduced.

For many philosophers, epistemological intuitionism, which seems to assume the possession of a kind of a moral sixth sense, was untenable. This sense was to discover moral truth, just like visual perception allows recognizing and distinguishing objects in the direct surrounding of a perceiving person. Without giving a more detailed explanation of moral intuition, its existence seems mysterious and some philosophers say that moral intuition is only an attempt to add authority to one's own moral opinions^[34].

Interestingly, two decades after the publication of *The Right and the Good*, intuitionism was widely rejected, primarily due to its assumption about the existence of a moral field that would be separate from the natural domain and the assumption of intuition as a special moral sense^[35]. Today, however, one can observe a renewed interest in intuitionism, and Robert Audi – a philosopher who has done a lot for the rehabilitation of this theory – attempted to solve the problem of how reason can be able to grasp certain basic truths about moral reality^[36]. Audi claims that the rules re-

³⁴Jonathan Dancy, (1993) Intuitionism, in: A Companion to Ethics, ed. Singer, P. Blackwell, p. 412.

³⁵Ibidem.

³⁶Audi, R. (2004) *The Good and the Right: A Theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

³²Ibidem, p. 29–30.

³³Ibidem, p. 39–41.

garding *prima facie* duties can be derived from the categorical imperative of Kant, which also gives the opportunity to systematize them. The American philosopher named his theory 'Kantian intuitionism' and noted that his solution allows for basing *prima facie* duties on one common basis, which consists in treating people as goals in themselves. This rule also explains the binding force of these duties.

The most important argument of moral anti-naturalists in favor of distinguishing the natural world from the moral world consists in the thesis about the normativity of morality. This is why some modern references to naturalistic fallacy in the moral context concern particularly its normative character^[37]. Normativity is an issue currently discussed vigorously by philosophers, however it is difficult to provide its precise, non-controversial characteristics. This is due, among other things, to the fact that this concept is used in relation to various phenomena, such as meaning^[38], beliefs^[39], law^[40], and even mathematics^[41]. In the moral context, normativity is usually explained by referring to the concept of a reason. A useful analysis of the concept of a reason was carried out by Audi, which divided it into three categories: norma-

tive, motivational, and explanatory^[42]. Normative reasons are objective reasons, regardless of whether they are possessed by someone. Normative reasons are, therefore, reasons that indicate what action is right, for example, avoiding lies. Some normative reasons are reasons for every human being, while others are individualized, like the reason of doing something that would help a friend of a given person^[43]. These reasons can be used to justify action. Motivational reasons are, on the other hand, reasons which someone has – they are always the reasons of a given person for a specific action^[44]. These reasons can be used to explain the corresponding action. Rationalizing explanations are, in turn, reasons that indicate why someone behaves in a certain way. Explanatory reasons mainly indicate the reasons for a given action, although they may also motivate.

Normative reasons which include moral reasons, differ significantly from motivational and explanatory reasons. For example, moral reasons do not have to motivate someone who recognizes them to act. People in deep depression are not motivated by moral reasons, even if they recognize these reasons. If it is possible to recognize a moral reason and not to act in accordance with it, then the moral reason will not always be the cause of the given action. What is particularly important, anti-naturalists argue that moral reasons, as the reasons indicating what action should be taken, refer to facts. Only in this way can their normative authority be explained. This does not mean, however, that the existence of a

³⁷Brożek, A., Brożek, B., Stelmach, J. Fenomen normatywności, op. cit., p. 195–204.

³⁸Brożek, B. (2013) The Normativity of Meaning, in: The Many Faces of Normativity, eds. Stelmach, J., Brożek, B., Hohol, M. Kraków: Copernicus Center Press, p. 147–176.

³⁹Kurek, Ł. Dualizm przekonań. Kraków: Copernicus Center Press.

⁴⁰Brożek, B. (2012) Normatywność prawa, Warszawa: Wolters Kluwer.

⁴¹Brożek, B., Hohol, M. (2013) Czy matematyka jest normatywna?, in: W świecie powinności, Brożek, B., Hohol, M., Kurek, Ł., Stelmach, J., Kraków: Copernicus Center Press, p. 173–200.

⁴²Audi, R. (2010) Reasons for Action, in: The Routledge Companion to Ethics, ed. Skorupski, J., Londyn: Routledge, p. 275–285.

⁴³Ibidem, p. 275.

⁴⁴Ibidem.

given moral reason implies that someone has realized its truthfulness. In summary, moral reasons have two features that make them seem unfit for the naturalistic image of the world: they are objective – independent of beliefs held by people – and they serve to justify and not explain action.

Summary

Naturalistic fallacy was the subject of great dispute in the history of the 20th-century metaethics, the scale of which was directly proportional to the influence of this argument on the development of this field of philosophy. In fact, the metaethics of the last century can be understood as a sequence of reactions to Moore's views. Some philosophers say, then, that 'twentieth-century British ethics theory is unthinkable without reference to the *Principia Ethica*'^[45]. One of the most

important issues discussed in this work was naturalistic fallacy, and modern metaethics developed precisely on the basis of 20th-century British philosophy. The naturalistic fallacy argument – due to the problems connected with it which have been presented above – does not currently enjoy a status comparable to its status at the beginning of the last century. However, many contemporary philosophers admit that the naturalization of morals is by no means a simple undertaking, and even – as antinaturalists claim – that it is entirely impossible. They do not do not refer in this context to problems related to the definition of moral concepts, but to other issues, in particular to the normativity of morality. On the other hand, naturalists and non-cognitivists want to maintain a continuity between philosophy and empirical sciences, noting that metaethics is not autonomous with respect to these sciences – if only because of their important role in determining the influence of moral judgments on action and the nature of moral emotions.

⁴⁵Baldwin T., Moore, G. E. op. cit., p. 66.

References

- [1] Andersen, E. (2014). Dewey's Moral Philosophy. E. Zalta (ed.) The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/dewey-moral/>.
- [2] Audi, R. (2004). The Good and the Right: A Theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- [3] Audi, R. (2010). Reasons for Action, in: Skorupski, J. (ed.) The Routledge Companion to Ethics, London: Routledge, p. 275–285.
- [4] Ayer, A. J. (1936). Language, Truth and Logic. London: Gollancz.
- [5] Baldwin, T. (1990). G. E. Moore. London: Routledge.
- [6] Brożek, A., Brożek, B., Stelmach, J. (2013). Fenomen normatywności, Kraków: Copernicus Center Press.
- [7] Brożek, B. (2013). The Normativity of Meaning, in: Stelmach, J., Brożek, B., Hohol, M. (eds.), The Many Faces of Normativity, Kraków: Copernicus Center Press, p. 147–176.
- [8] Brożek, B., Hohol, M. (2013). Czy matematyka jest normatywna?, in: Brożek, B., Hohol, M., Kurek, Ł., Stelmach, J., (eds.) W świecie powinności, Kraków: Copernicus Center Press, p. 173–200.
- [9] Dancy, J. (1993). Intuitionism, in: Singer, P. (ed.) A Companion to Ethics, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 268–287.
- [10] Geach, P. (1960). Ascriptivism. Philosophical Review, 69, p. 221–225.
- [11] Gibbard, A. (1990). Wise Choices, Apt Feelings. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- [12] Hacker, (2007). Beyond the Linguistic Turn and Back Again, in: Beaney, M. (ed.), The Analytic Turn. Analysis in Early Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology, London: Routledge, p. 125–133.
- [13] Hare, R. (1952). The Language of Morals. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- [14] Hume, D. (1738-40/1975). A Treatise on Human Nature. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- [15] Kripke, S. (1980). Naming and Necessity. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- [16] Kurek, Ł. (2016). Dualizm przekonań. Kraków: Copernicus Center Press.
- [17] Lewis, D. (1986). On the Plurality of Worlds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [18] Moore, G. E. (1922). Philosophical Studies, London: Harcourt, Brace & Co.
- [19] Moore, G. E. (1968). Principia Ethica. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [20] Ogden, C. Richards, I. (1923). The meaning of meaning. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Young.
- [21] Prichard, H. (2002). Moral Writings. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- [22] Putnam, H. (1975). The meaning of 'meaning'. Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, 7, p. 131–193.
- [23] Ross, W. (2002). The Right and the Good. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [24] Searle, J. (1962). Meaning and Speech Acts. Philosophical Review, 71, p. 423–432.
- [25] Sosa, E. (2001), G. E. Moore. in: Martinich, A. P., Sosa, D. (eds.) A Companion to Analytic Philosophy, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 45–56.
- [26] Stevenson, C. (1937). The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms. Mind, 46, p. 14–31.
- [27] Stout, R. (2008). Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy, in: Moran, D. (ed.) The Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy, Nowy York: Routledge, p. 851–882.
- [28] Sturgeon, N. (2006). Ethical Naturalism, in: Copp, D. (ed.) The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 91–121.

Word count: 8000 Tables: – Figures: –

Copyright:

© 2017 Faculty of Law and Administration, University of Gdansk. Published by Index Copernicus Sp. z o.o. All rights reserved

Funding:

The project has been financed by the National Science Centre under Decision No. DEC-2012/04 / A / HS5 / 00655.



The content of the journal „Polish Law Review” is circulated on the basis of the Open Access which means free and limitless access to scientific data.



This material is available under the Creative Commons - Attribution 4.0 GB. The full terms of this license are available on: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/legalcode>

Corresponding author:

Łukasz Kurek; Department of Philosophy of Law and Legal Ethics at the Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland; e-mail: lukasz.kurek1@gmail.com

Table of contents 2017:

<https://polishlawreview.pl/resources/html/articlesList?issueld=10603>

Cite this article as:

Kurek Ł.: Naturalistic fallacy; Pol Law Rev, 2017 Vol. 3 (1); 262–278

NOTES

NOTES